

Built by Vinalhaven students, the Freya will sail

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Vinalhaven High School senior Patrick Gasperini (right) works on stowing the main sail on the 30-foot sloop Freya shortly before it was launched Saturday in Vinalhaven. Gasperini is one of several students who worked on restoring the Intrepid steel sloop over the past 21/2 years. BANGOR DAILY NEWS PHOTO BY GABOR DEGRE



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The 30-foot Intrepid sloop Freya leaves the dock in Vinalhaven on Saturday. About 150 people came to see the launch of the 50-year-old boat that was completely rebuilt by Vinalhaven High School students over the past 21/2 years under the leadership of Mark Jackson. The first trip will start in the early fall when the Freya will sail to Florida, changing the crew of students along the way. BANGOR DAILY NEWS PHOTO BY GABOR DEGRE



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When island teens get the urge to see the world, it's only natural they would choose to make the journey by boat.

Freya, a 30-foot sloop launched from Hopkins Boat Yard on Saturday, will carry Vinalhaven high school students the length of the East Coast during the next school year.

The steel-hulled sloop, like the island students who rebuilt it, is rugged and practical and, in a way, pretty, as the vessel took a few turns around Carver's Harbor with the island's fleet of lobster boats as a backdrop.

The launching, which drew about 150 students, teachers, parents and community members, marked the end of a 21/2-year process and the beginning of a new chapter for the Freya and Vinalhaven High School students.

Students first dreamed of a boat that would carry them around the world, but settled for the more practical goal of sailing to the Chesapeake Bay and then Florida, and then back to the Chesapeake and Maine. Three or four students will sail with an instructor for each six-week leg.

The circa-1953 vessel, discovered in a Web search, was someone's abandoned fixer-upper. Mark Jackson, who teaches at Vinalhaven High School under the auspices of the Rockland-based Mid-Coast School of Technology, hoped the

old sloop was worth taking on.

It was, but he and the students faced some serious challenges in order to make the boat seaworthy. A bulkhead had to be replaced, the hull was sandblasted and painted, a new rudder fabricated, an engine and electronics installed, and the cabin and deck rebuilt.

For some seniors, Freya's launch was bittersweet because they won't get to participate in the voyage.

Patrick Gasperini, 17, was attending to last-minute details Saturday afternoon before the launch, filling the boat's water tanks to improve its ballast, washing down decks and making sure the necessary lines were attached.

The experience helped give him career direction.

"I plan on going to boat-building school," he said.

Natalie Reed, a 15-year-old ninth-grader, is looking forward to the sail made possible by Gasperini's and other students' labor. She already owns a small sailboat and enjoys being on the water.

"I really like sailing, and I really like the ocean, and I really don't like school," she said matter-of-factly. The six weeks at sea will get her away from the rigidity of the classroom, Reed said.

Though she wasn't involved from the beginning, her class built a dinghy that will be carried aboard the Freya.

Shawn Davis, a 17-year-old sophomore, worked on the boat but isn't interested in going on the sail.

"I just like hands-on projects," he said, watching the last-minute preparations. "I don't like sailing."

Clearly, it will take a special kind of student to sign on for the six-week trips. The cabin is very snug, with four narrow berths built to fold down in the tiny area that serves as kitchen, dining room and living room. The instructor's berth is in the forward part of the cabin, and also contains the head, or bathroom.

Michaela O'Neill, a first-year math teacher at the school, will help coordinate land-based operations for the trips.

The curriculum, like the trip itself, is a natural for island students, she said. Math will be covered through old-fashioned celestial navigation; science will include weather observations and measurements; history will focus on the coastal regions the students will sail by; and literature might include maritime literature.

There are also plans to visit cities where Vinalhaven granite has been used for buildings and monuments.

"They're bringing one laptop," O'Neill said, and the students will communicate with the school by e-mail and possibly video clips.

Parents of students slated to sail on the Freya have been supportive but concerned about safety, Jackson said.

"There's a lot of discussion about what the safety precautions are," he said, "and how and when communication will occur." Students will complete a CPR course before departing.

Chris Toy, who works for Co-Seed - a nonprofit group affiliated with Antioch New England Institute that gives grants to educational endeavors such as the Freya - gives the project high marks.

"It's authentic. It comes from the tradition of the area," he said. Toy especially liked the idea of students reading "Moby Dick" and "The Old Man and The Sea" while sailing.

The project is still seeking support to finish outfitting the boat. Jackson thanked area businesses which have supported the project, such as Rockland Boat Yard, Ocean Pursuits of Rockland and Doug Pope, who made the sails.

He also thanked Hopkins, whose boat yard stored and launched the vessel.

Just before the launch, Hopkins explained why the islanders were behind the project.

"Kids out here on the island live on the water and have to work on the water, and should be familiar with what it takes to get on the water - it's part of island living."

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